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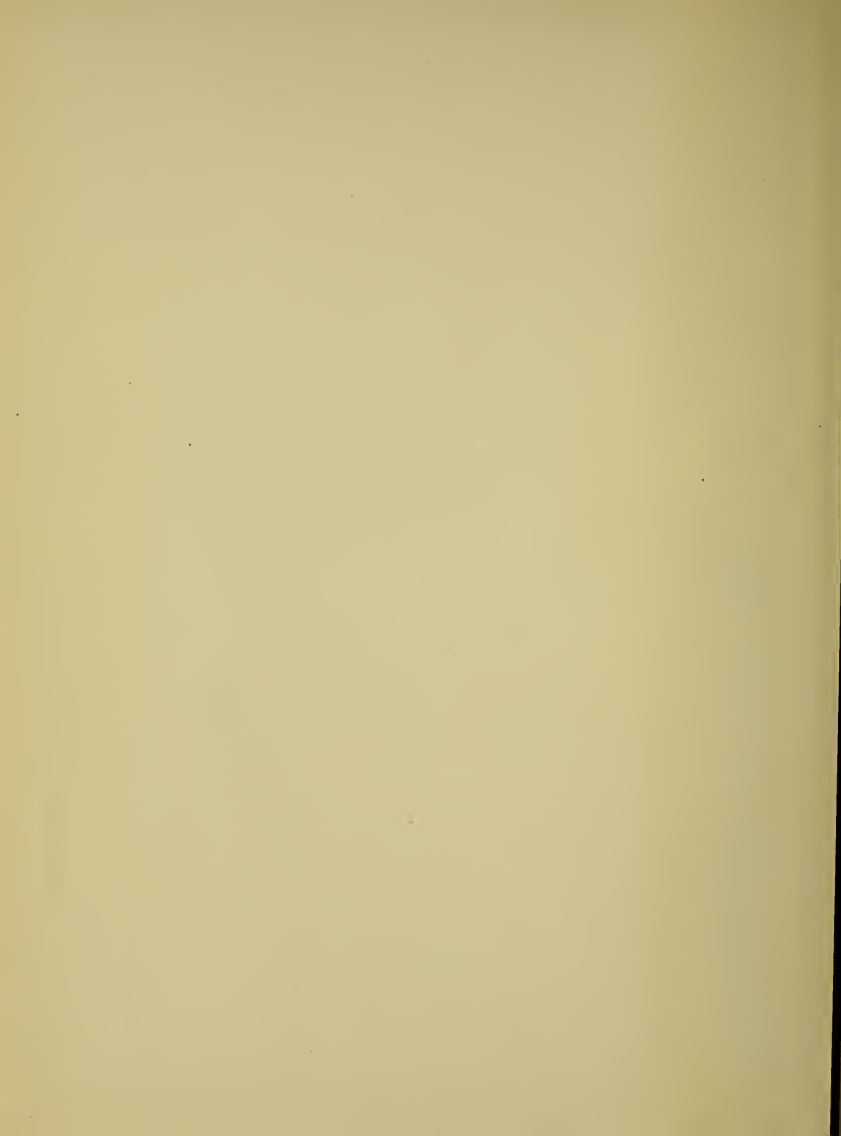


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Almost

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By John Erskine

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By Samuel Roth

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1917

Edited by Samuel Roth

Almost
By Martha B. Mosher

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ALMOST

by
Martha B. Mosher



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To
CHRISTINA HOWELL CHARLES
My Friend





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Almost





MY HEART IS BRAVE

My heart is brave for all things save for this:

That you should be the wind
And I be not the lyre whose strings it sweeps;
That I should be the night
And you be not the dream that thrills my sleep,
My heart is brave for all things save for this.

My heart is brave for all things save for this:

That you have list'ning ears
And my tongue be too dumb to whisper you;
That I should be the sea
And you the rock it breaks on futilely
My heart is brave for all things save for this.

My heart is brave for all things save for this:

That you should be the sun
And I the sands that cannot bear you life.
That life should keep you late
While I stand waiting at the Entrance Gate;
My brave heart swoons and sinks at fate like this.

STAR SONG

I roamed along with water and sky
For I with the night was passing by.

And gazing intent at the blue roof above
I saw from the stars fall a shower of love.

Then I knew that every suffering soul
Might have opened his heart and had it made whole

But each held a canopy over his head
That ever the fall of that love-rain had shed.

The melody sweet that might quicken each heart
Was lost—and could not its message impart.

I cried, 'Friends we need this song for our pain,
O, shield not our heads from beneficent rain;

Let us open our hearts—each one to the other,
And join in the star-song for ever, O brother!'

LULLABY

My dream of thee, my open arms
Coaxed thee down from the stars,
From God thy home thou camest down
Past all the earthly bars.

Enfolding thy dear baby form
I hug thee to my breast,
Thine own snug place to nestle warm
And dream and rest—and rest—

So close your tired . . . little eyes
And may they never weep.
Hush . . . every one tread quietly
Our darling . . . is asleep . . .

The Angels now will guide thee back
To gates of golden light
While mother's hand is not close by
To lead thee thru the night.

So I will spare thee for an hour
To play with Twinkling things
That call thee little sister still
Tho' thou hast lost thy wings.

Thou'lt ride safe in their pretty boat
We call the crescent moon,

And sing with them to Jesu dear
Thy very sweetest tune.

But play not with St. Michael's sword
Nor touch Queen Mary's crown;
Remember too, that mother here
Awaits thy coming down.

HAUNTED

Why can I not escape you
Why are you ever there?
At every turn you seek me,
Out in the open air,
Within my lamplit chamber,
As I descend the stair,
At night when I am dreaming,
I meet you everywhere.

And if you must pursue me,
Why will you never stay?
When I reach out to touch you
You slowly melt away—
Can it be I who trail you
And will not let you stray
Beyond my shadows' beckon
Before I bar the way?

If I might feel your warm breath,
See you unfettered move,
Could learn what 'tis that haunts me,
If it be ghost or love!
If love, then haste to dower me
With all delight thereof;
With our fire braid a love-rope
By which to climb above.

LOVE'S RECOMPENSE

Where are the many melodies
My little lute once played to me?
Today it sweeps to me but one;
That one contents—it is of thee.

Where are the many empty dreams
That hitherto my thoughts did throng?
Thou'st filled them all with thy dear self
So full that they complete my song.

THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

In silent and timorous beauty
They slumber, as green as verditer,
These Islands that time cannot sever
Nor sister love draw close together.

Are these the haunts of the siren
That stand so unsocial and steady,
Whose babes not even are ready
To gambol betimes in an eddy?

The great deep silence broods in them
The pine tree branches are not gay,
Arachne's delicate webs here sway
And make small ballrooms for a fay.

O Isles of Beauty, Isles of Rest
I greet you with this solemn prayer—
That some day I may be co-heir.
To the sacredness which now you wear.

LIFE'S ULTIMATE

The Ultimate of silence is
With eloquence the heart to swell;
The Ultimate of endless speech
Is impotence to tell;
The Ultimate of luxury
The luxury would be
To have a single crumb of you
To make an Epicure of me.
The Ultimate of knowledge
To fling life's problems back,
The Ultimate of daylight
Is that night's wings are black.
The Ultimate of solitude
In time and space and sea
Is the Soul retreated to Itself
In its Infinity!

EARTH WISDOM

The purest stream has still a muddy bed!
A dreamer stopping at a riverhead
Sat gazing long into the crystal stream;
Would that its beauty might content his dream!

But he would slake his thirst in waters fair,
And then his passion waxes bold to dare
The pool-reflected image to desire
That this Narcissus greatly did admire.

Impulsively he plunges to the quest . . .
But lo! there jets from the erst virgin breast
A heavy mire . . . The limpid stream has soiled
The image sought.—His eager leap is foiled!

A clouded faith will ever cast a shade.
The sage who always dwells in happy glade
Is he who holds to his illusion fast!
Or, cherishing no dream, receives no blast!

"OH, YE OF LITTLE FAITH!"

"Ye think My heart is numb, My ears are deaf;
That I view silently in cold disdain,
My children die; limb torn from limb: my hosts,
 Brave hosts, thus cruelly slain?

Tho' in My world live slaves who still believe
That they must bow their heads to crown and rod
Of greedy governments that crush them down,
 I still exist—their God.

But when the world is free of tyranny,
And when the fear is laid that through the years
Man's liberty will perish from the globe,
 Then shall I dry your tears.

For what appears destruction is My way
Of freeing earth from greater evil still;
Then know that past your insight there are gleams
 That My dreams shall fulfill.

Now let your groans and your distress subside,
And your full faith in Me shine through your tears;
New courage, nobler vision, will survive
 Beyond the haze of years."

IN MEMORY

Your legioned friends are sorrowing at the phrase
For all too soon you poured out life's bright wine,
And we must mourn you on thru countless days—
So to your gentle soul I build this shrine.

Your saintly face will ever shine upon us,
A star to lead us to the court of God,
Your kindly spirit always so desirous
To bless and better every path you trod.

Dear friend, so leal to Friendship's deepest meaning,
Your life was selfless, high and pure and true;
So we, our eyes with sorrows' veil enshrouding
Say "Sleep, Farewell—and know that we love you."

LOVE'S PARADOX

Until you came into my life
I was a being, I was I,
Now you are my identity;
My soul so full of peace and poise
Knows only din, is drenched in noise.

Until you came into my life
I was as free as bird of care,
Now I have earth and sky to bear:
I who have been both rich and great
I stand a beggar at your gate.

Until you came into my life
It often craved a solitude
Which it has now in plentitude.
Tho' you have nothing given me
My heart beats loud in memory.

EARTH CALL

I have floated, I think, in dreams too long,
My soul has grown lonely in far-away song;
Once again I would touch the plant and the tree,
Let the hills and the brook come play with me.

My eyes cannot always to star-shine cling,
My thoughts would be green with the leaves of spring,
My blood calls for boulders and wild March days
To calm it down from the mad moon's rays.

The birds and the hedge and a breath of toil
Are the sights that will still my heart's turmoil,
For I have floated in dreams too long
My soul must renew with a human song.

GARDENIA FLORIDA

A youth and maiden passed by me last night,
Their hearts and voices singing loud with glee,
But when I shook my perfume over them,
They kissed and trembled in love's mystery.
I know not whence they came, nor whither bent,
But they have lived and will remember me.

Then one came by who had forgot his God,
Whose acts had long disturbed his soul's content;
The very sweetest odors of my heart
I spilled on his, till it, by memory rent
Cried 'mother'—to one waiting his return.
Tho' short-lived I awaken souls with scent.

COLUMBIA'S SONS

A trumpet blew and our youths' eyes
Were straining toward foreign skies!
They did not shirk to pay the price
Oppression asked in sacrifice.
They braved pain, hunger and despair
That all of earth might be the heir
Of life, of love, of liberty—
That all the fettered might be free.
They've swung wide every dungeon door
And helped the brave to win the war.

Chorus

A bugle broke our country's mood
And Freedom surged in her blood.
To arms—to arms—the world had utmost need!
'To arms' they cried, that spawn of mighty seed!
Columbia's Sons of many lands
Rose loyal to her high commands.
One earnest aim filled all her men,
To crush the tyrant in his den.
Their task was scarce begun before 'twas done.

Thy clarion Lord, called them again
They were thy hosts—thou leadest men
Who died for dreams; 'twas a new world
For which their banners were unfurled.

The Kaiser was a man of straw
Against the blades that they did draw.
Their spirit made his cause forlorn
Before the day that he was born.
The old flag billows! Eyes now gaze
On the land they saved—to peaceful days.

GOD'S SERVICE FLAG

The sky is full of stars tonight
And every one so rarely bright;
It is God's Service Flag that shows
A star for every man who goes
In answer to the human call
To which he sacrifices all,
Whose heart divine has understood
The passionate plea for brotherhood.
God HIS Sword in his hand has thrust;
He grips it firmly—since he must—
To kill the false, till Love is Lord,
To strike the fist so heavenly mailed
It cannot feel the pulse assailed.
Those stars of strength in heaven's zone
That shine for righteousness alone
Will stand thru evil days and good
For Liberty and Brotherhood.

WAKE

The stage eternal each day set for us
Lures me thru casement eyes to view the sun
As he with golden fingers, out of night,
Uplifts the earth's dark curtains, one by one.
From scenes that lie before me still and strange.
He strikes the gloom, and scatters it to crest
Of hills in golden fume. From his low range
The slow light filters thru the trees and streams,
And all the porticoes of morning throng
With birds that wait to carol forth their song.

These many tribed creatures, downy soft,
Trill forth unfathomed sweetness from each throat,
From some the epic, some the joy of life
Wells forth in anguished or in chirping note.
The mountains in their movements ever change
As their new heads and breasts come into view,
And their gaunt monster knees in parts show thru.
Between cloud-shrines the high priest mounts his path
And sees the heart of man still seek to fit
His finite yearning to the infinite!

THE SNOW

Down from the brooding silence of grey skies
It floats and wavers, trembles to the ground;
Tho' whirling with live motion in descent
Its fall makes, like the panther's tread, no sound.

The earth that gives glad welcome to the rain
Scowls only on this uninvited guest,
Will not throw open doors to bid it in,
Ungracious, tho it comes as virgin dressed.

Exhausted by their long flight from the clouds
The wandering flakes, at last, lie dead and still,
And feel no further impulse till the wind
Hurls them in heavy drifts by force and will

Its softness smoothes sharp angles from the rocks,
In air it spins fine lace work for the trees;
Then spreads itself a shiny bridal veil
The angry earth with beauty to appease.

The heaped-up drifts invite the burning heart
To cool itself within their virgin folds,
Its silence, soothes all bitterness of thought
And earth, inspired, receives the guest she holds.

GOOD CHEER TO MY COMRADES

Say that I died with one regret
That when the Allies' Cabinet
Has at the Victors' Council met,
I cannot clasp your hands

Say if my bullets that remained
May speed on with my heart's blood stained,
E'en tho my hands in death be chained,
They still will clasp your hands.

Say that tho fate o'ertook me—yet
The glorious risk I'll not forget;
You who to the end with wrongs still whet
Your swords—then clasp my hands.

Say that the dead have more prevailed
Than they who have not fought and failed;
My soldier soul, with hearts that quailed,
Cannot give clasp of hands.

THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

Great River, still as any frozen sea
I saw thee mid thy moonlit isles at rest,
Encircled of their arms, at peace and blest.
Inconstant stream, with springs unsealed and free,
Unconscious of thy true sublimity,
I then beheld thee opening up thy breast
And throbbing forth thy soul with eager zest
To meet the far off ocean calling thee.

At that great voice thy spirit knew its goal
To mingle thy deep waters with its own,
Forsaking beauteous isles for fate unknown:
So may my course like thine not turn aside,
But ever with such single purpose glide
Till seas celestial overflow my soul.

THE GIFT BEARERS

The seas were cleft to bring her to these shores,
The waves rolled proudly in with Liberty;
From east to west they surged, for her domain
Must here be set, safe everlastingly.
And now their sons sail back across the main
Out from the west, with stars and stripes in hand
To bear this gift of Liberty again
To all who suffer in the eastern land.

They set the world away, give up the age
Of work and joy: their strong hearts, still unspent
Are offered now as shields to the oppressed
Knowing that death may be their monument.
May this great gift now borne across the sea
Crown them who give with immortality.

LOVE'S BURIAL

Oh Heart bereft, thou nevermore wilt see
Her image dear; nor will thy footsteps beat
An echo following her heart and feet.
Now will life's hill be steep and chill for me.
And 'ere thy speech be still, what word from thee,
My soul, would'st urge?—thou ever still replete
With utterance that is no longer meet
That thou should'st feel? *Would'st speak thy agony!*

Must bury, Heart, thy love without delay;
No memory of her mayest thou retain,
Not e'en an afterglow of long set days,
Nor echoes of the music passed away;
No recognition may'st thou henceforth trace;
Thy hope will, aye, renascence seek in vain.

UNDER THE SWORD

Didst Thou, O Christ, from death arise again?
Or, liest Thou yet in thy dim sepulchre
Where Mary brought Thee balm and spice and myrrh,
Or was Thy resurrection all in vain?
Dost Thou not hear these bitter cries of pain?
How long must we endure this massacre?
Art Thou no longer, Lord, earth's Arbiter,
That Thou canst calmly see this Terror reign?

Descend, great Son of God, and lift our gloom;
Bring back the stars into our sable night,
Let tyrants from their cursed thrones be hurled:
So may we know that Thou didst quit Thy tomb.—
O God, omnipotent! declare Thy might,
Lest faith depart, and demons rule the world.

THE SEA SPEAKS

O Earth, hast thou no longer space to hold
The creatures whom the Lord assigned to thee?
I thought he gave the fishes unto me
And human beings were not of my fold.
Ill chance alone to my embrace had rolled
Some victims. But the new world deity,
The lord of frightfulness, with blasphemy
Has strewn my bed with numbers yet untold.

With every rise and fall of my full heart,
With every long roll of my billows deep
I'll mourn these victims thru their last long sleep.
From tyranny to wrest me was their part,
They came as champions of democracy,
And gave their all to set their nations free.

EVENING REVELRY AT THOUSAND ISLANDS

Across the rippling miles this river flows,
Across the baby isles that intervene,
Whose rocky beds lift coronals of green,
Above earth's edge, the gleaming wine press shows
Emerging from pale clouds at daylight's close.
Now as he fills his press with grapes divine
The peasant-sun here tramples out the wine
And spills it on each cloud-fleece till it glows.

The purple must drips from the west, and dyes
A waterpath incarnadine and gold.
The rustic revel fades before my eyes;
I homeward turn, as evening shadows fold
About the land, while in the twilight spell
The last departing peasant waves farewell.

SORCERY

I am again in love with life thru thee!
But yesterday my sails were closely furled;
Grey rain, and not a breath in all the world;
The stars were gone, no moon beamed on my sea,
I knew no port where one awaited me.
Now what is life but death when no fierce flame
In any heart responds unto your name?
What value then had immortality?

Today's the noontide of my spirit's hour,
The great winds of the world tear at my ropes
Since I from out a wandering flame caught you
To fill my breast with love's own gladdening power;
The ribbon rainbow carries me my hopes
The roof of our abode shows only blue.

LOVE'S DESOLATION

With brightness, Love, you might have filled my way,
And with your glory have beset my road;
I bade you take my heart for your abode,
But from it you did turn your eyes away,
And to my joy-defrauded spirit say
No word of solace. Hope that warmly glowed
Lies breathless. Only memories you've bestowed
Of lost desire that nothing can allay.

A dream was woven in my yearning heart
Of things beyond all dreams. It called my soul
To you as new born promise, new sought goal.
But you would in my vision have no part . . .
I am lone actor in my dream. You've shown
My goal was a mirage. I am Alone.

VISION

Great knowledge may be mine; well may I know
The process of the tide-controlling moon,
May understand the laws of nature's rune;
But if at view of flower or star, no glow
Within my breast can quicken my blood's flow,
If I am dead of soul, or dim or sight
To beauty's flash, then have I reached black night,
Have lingered here too long and well may go.

For if my sight no vision with it bears,
And I nod on in witless apathy,
Then is the travail of this life for nought;
But if earth's splendor in my soul has wrought,
And if my wisdom my emotion shares,
Then am I part of all life's ecstasy.

A LOVER'S SOLILOQUY

Since at her heart so often you have sought
Access, my soul, why will you never see
The gates are barred against you mightily
And this desire of yours you have not fought
Against, with sinews knit and stoutly wrought.
So weak is your poor will, from vine on tree
The tendrils frail could draw you helplessly
To her. 'Tis clutching at hope's hem has brought

You this poor meed. So wilful still your heart!
Your fingers will not quit the shattered lute
Altho its music is for you now mute.
Your melody is locked in you for aye,
The chords are still with full lays strung, O Heart,
And to the end their cadences will play.

MY ULTIMATE SELF

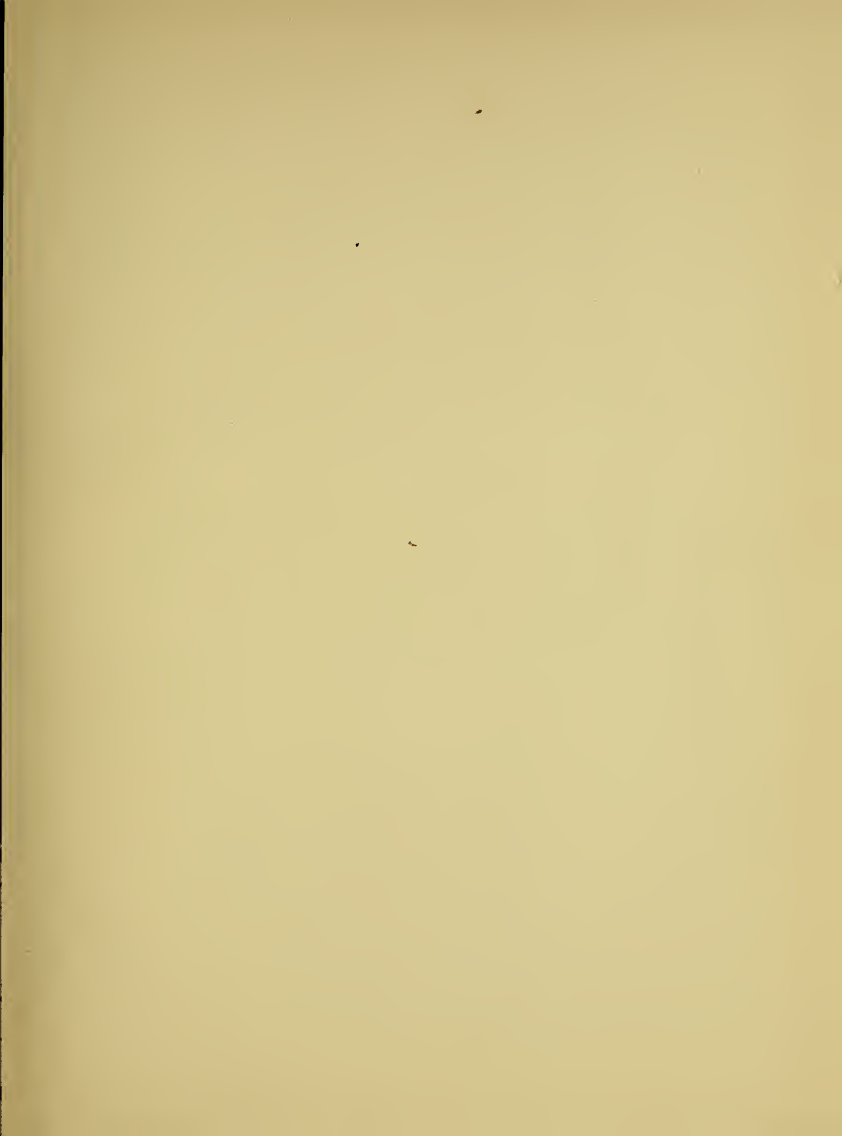
This other One who rules my life within
Holds me from evil way, my moods uncouth
Translates to lasting universal truth.
Rejoicing in my strength, hurt with my sin
He fans the spark that holds my purpose kin
To that of the most distant orb; or soothes
My life's turmoil; or from my spirit smoothes
The frown with thoughts that overlook the din.

This Sovereign Self is like unto the moon
That drags the tides of this unruly me
Wherefrom and whither she herself elects,
While in control she holds great waves that soon
Or late break epochs in the soul. Thus he,
My Other Self, keeps vigil and directs.

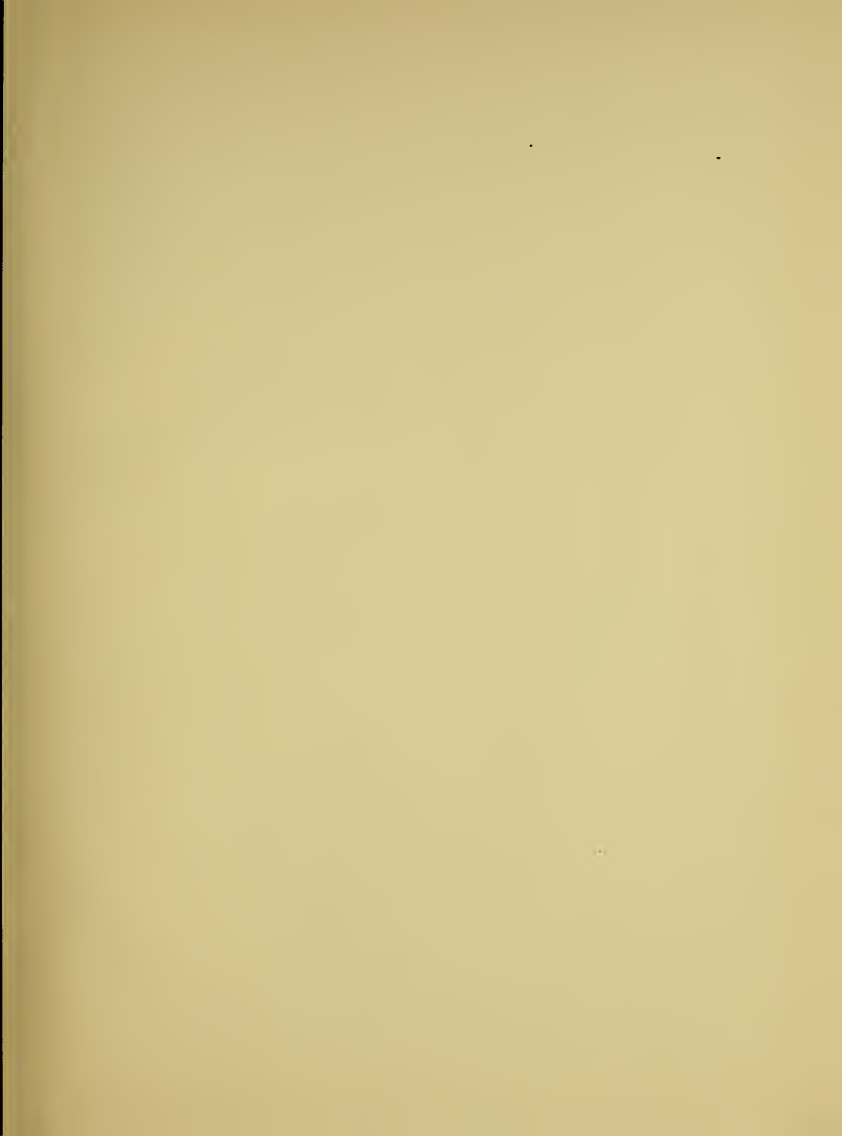
MY LOVE

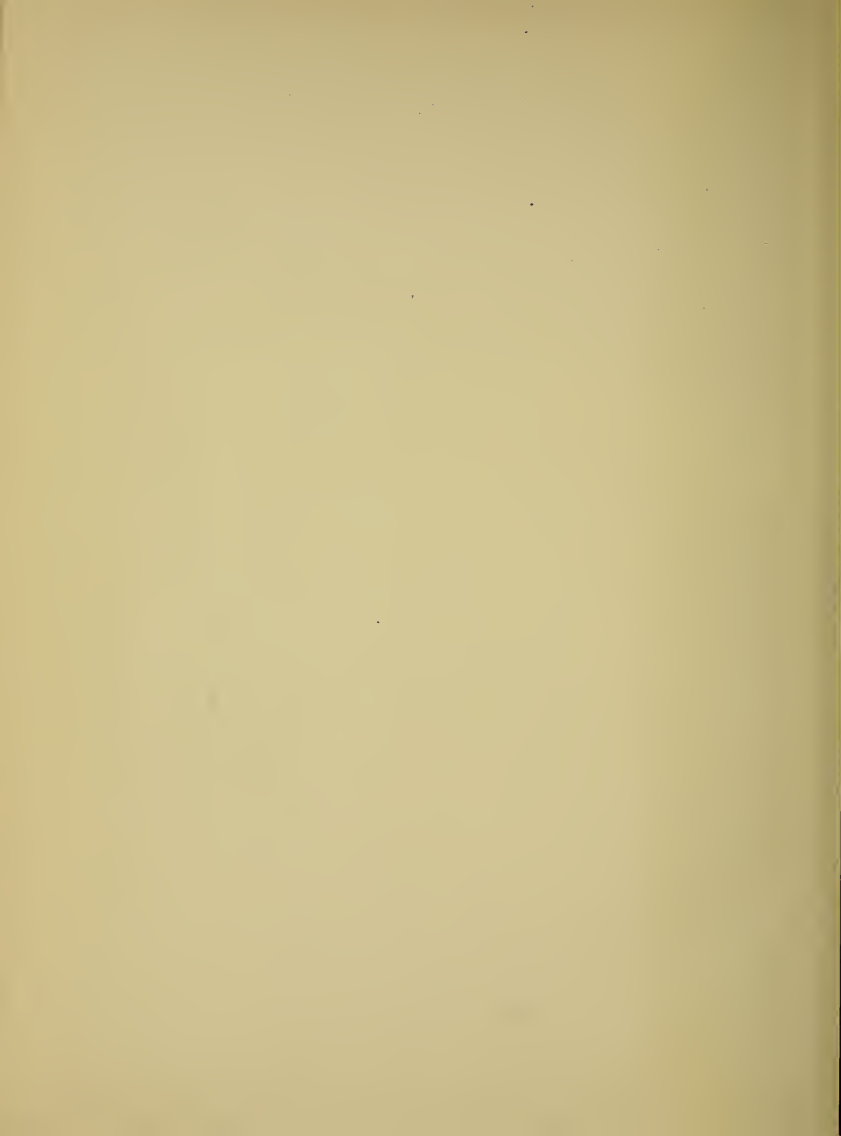
To speak your name my love, brings peace
Unto my soul. Not e'en that precious name
Can all the tenderness of my love frame,
It over flows all measure. Should "my love" cease
To sound its blessed meaning—seek release
From grants of further largess, I'll not blame;
In loneliness I'll cherish it the same.
The magic spell can never know decrease.

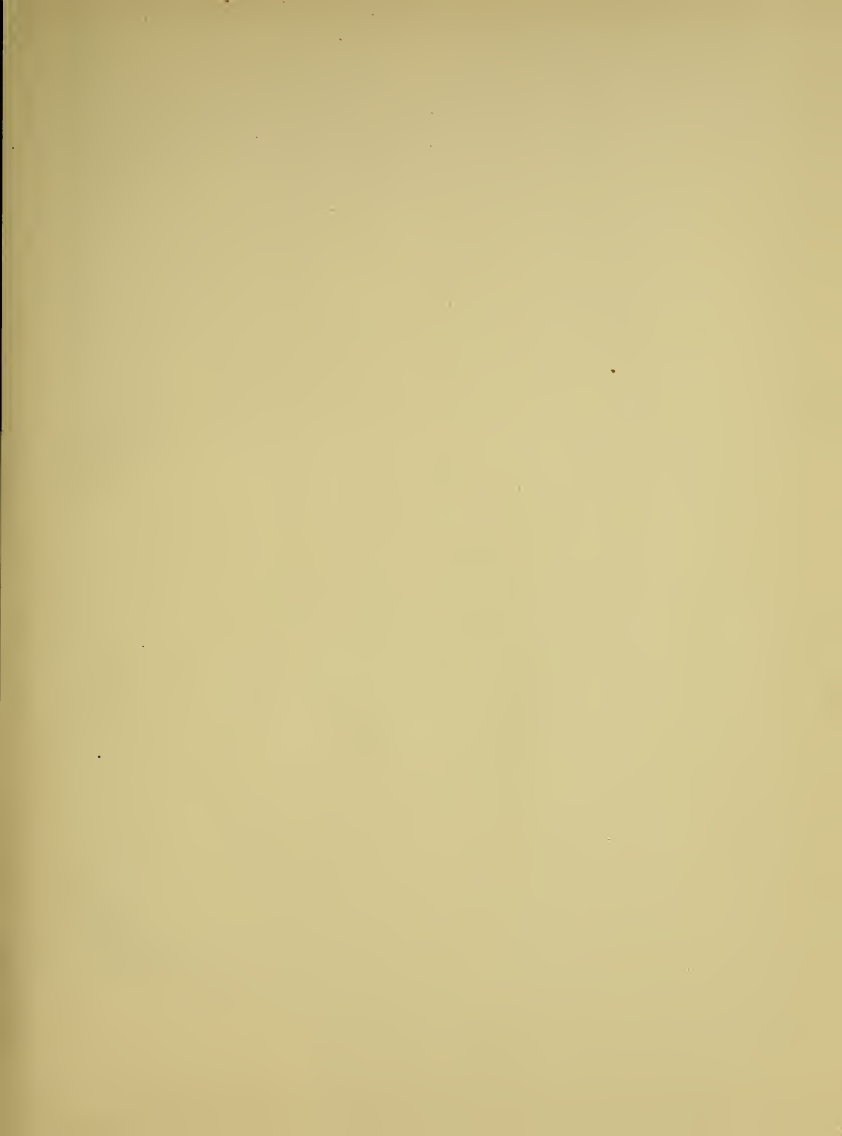
In you is now fulfilled my noblest dream
That had its birth in the Supreme above.
And since my thoughts have now no place to play
Because you took from me my dreams away,
Pray pledge yourself to leave me still my theme
And give me aye possession of my Love.









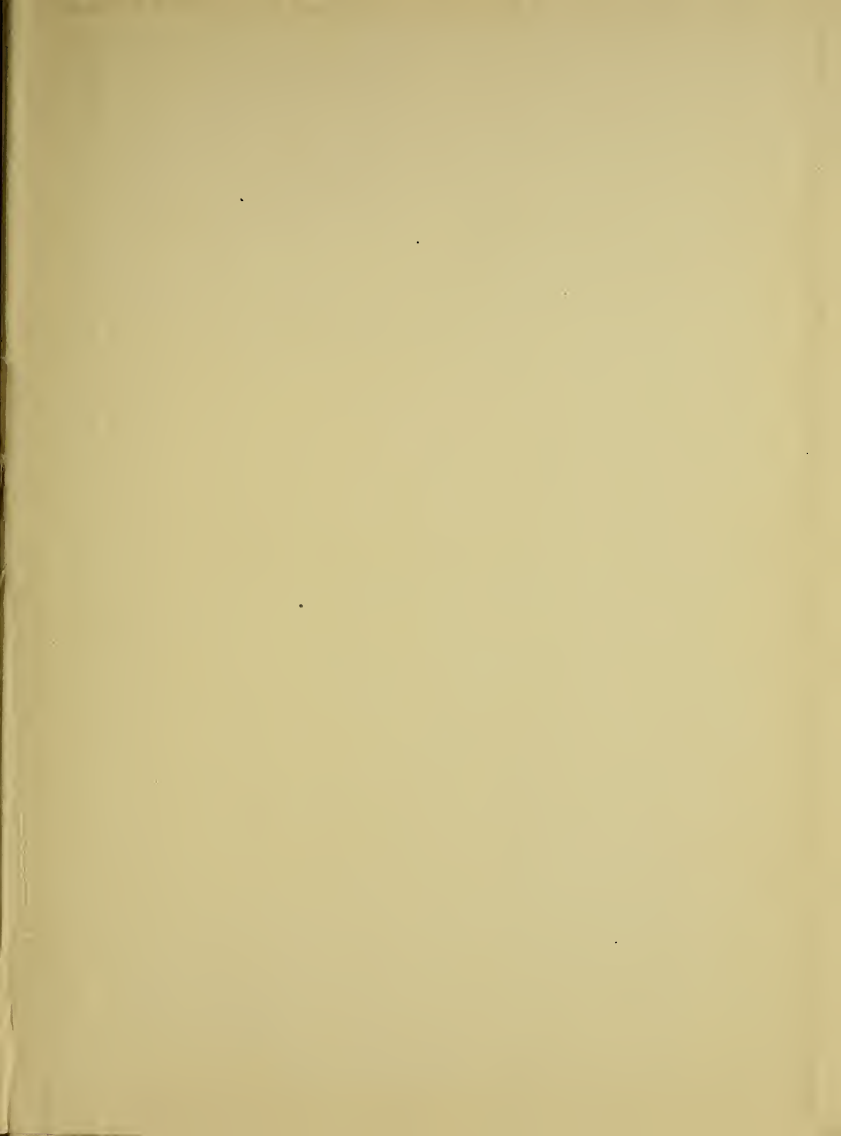


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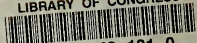
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